

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 3570

EO 11652: GDS
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SUBJ: POLITICAL SUMMARIES: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

REF: BOGOTA 3306

1. SUMMARY. EFFORTS TO HEAL THE LINGERING LIBERAL PARTY RIFT IN BOGOTA HAVE MET WITH ONLY PARTIAL SUCCESS. PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES CONTINUE PRESENTING THEIR VIEWS THROUGH GOVERNMENT-ALLOTTED TELEVISION TIME. NEGATIVE REACTIONS TO A CBS TELEVISION PROGRAM'S ALLEGATIONS OF OFFICIAL COLOMBIAN CORRUPTION CONTINUE, BUT WITH DIMINISHING FREQUENCY DUE PARTIALLY TO DOMESTIC CHARGES OF OTHER OFFICIAL WRONGDOING. THE M-19 TERRORIST GROUP'S ACTIVITIES HIGHLIGHT THE WEEK'S INTERNAL SECURITY PROBLEMS.
END SUMMARY.

2. RIFT AMONG BOGOTA LIBERALS CONTINUES. LIBERAL CANDIDATE TURBAY MOVED TO HEAL FACTIONALISM IN BOGOTA CAUSED BY A RUMP MOVEMENT OF FORMER FOLLOWERS OF CARLOS LLERAS. TURBAY APPOINTED A 12-PERSON
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BOGOTA CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE COMPOSED OF FIVE OLD-LINE TURBAY LOYALISTS AND SEVEN FORMER LLERAS SUPPORTERS. SOME FORMER LLERAS MILITANTS, NOW TURBAYISTAS, HAVE PUBLICLY URGED TURBAY TO INCLUDE IN HIS NATIONAL LEADERSHIP INDEPENDENT LIBERALS OF STATURE, SUCH AS AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S. BARCO AND FORMER PRE-CANDIDATE AGUDELO VILLA. THE PARADE OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES ON FREE ONE-HALF HOUR TV SEGMENTS CONTINUED WITH THE APPEARANCE

OF RETIRED GENERAL ALVARO VALENCIA TOVAR FOR THE INDEPENDENT NATIONAL RENEWAL MOVEMENT AND JULIO CESAR PERNIA FOR THE COALITION LED BY THE NATIONAL OPPOSITION UNION, ITSELF A COALITION DOMINATED BY THE MOSCOW-LINE COLOMBIAN COMMUNIST PARTY (PCC). VALENCIA CONCENTRATED ON THE PROBLEMS OF PUBLIC MORALITY AND INSECURITY IN A PERSUASIVE, REASONABLE MANNER. PERNIA, IN A SNAKE OIL VENDOR'S STYLE, CONCENTRATED HIS FIRE ON THE "RULING OLIGARCHY" AND ON U.S. "IMPERIALISM," ESPECIALLY THE LATTER. HE DID NOT RESPOND TO THE PREVIOUS WEEK'S ATTACKS ON HIM AND THE PCC BY MAOIST-SUPPORTED PIEDRAHITA. COMMENT: THE HOLD-OUT LLERISTAS IN BOGOTA, ALTHOUGH DIVIDED (REFTEL), WILL CONTINUE TO BE RELUCTANT TO SUBMERGE THEMSELVES AND DILUTE THEIR POWER IN THE NOW TURBAY-DOMINATED LIBERAL PARTY, UNLESS TURBAY MAKES IT ADVANTAGEOUS FOR THEM TO DO SO. IT IS TOO SOON TO TELL WHAT EFFECT THIS FACTIONALISM WILL HAVE ON THE JUNE 4 ELECTION. THE CANDIDATES' TV SERIES, PROVIDING A NATIONAL PLATFORM FOR LITTLE KNOWN CANDIDATE WITH LITTLE OR NO PARTY MACHINERY BEHIND THEM, THIS WEEK ALLOWED VALENCIA TOVAR TO PROJECT MORE WIDELY THE QUALITIES - "CHARISMA," ACCORDING TO A LIBERAL EL TIEMPO WRITER - WHICH HAVE WON HIM THE RESPECT OF MOST WHO KNOW HIM PERSONALLY.

3. CBS CORRUPTION EPISODE LINGERS. WHILE GREATLY DIMINISHED, PRESS ATTENTION TO THE CBS "SIXTY MINUTES" PROGRAM'S ALLEGATIONS OF HIGH-LEVEL, OFFICIAL COLOMBIAN INVOLVEMENT IN DRUG TRAFFICKING CONTINUED. ANIBAL TURBAY, THE LIBERAL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE'S NEPHEW WHO WAS NAMED IN THE TV PROGRAM, MADE HEADLINES BY DENYING ANY INVOLVEMENT
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IN TRAFFICKING AND SUGGESTING THAT HE MAY SUE CBS FOR DEFAMATION. SEVERAL PERSONAL OPINION ARTICLES ALSO APPEARED RECENTLY IN THE LOCAL PRESS, AND ONE MAJOR DAILY IS EXPECTED TO PUBLISH THE FULL TRANSCRIPT OF THE PROGRAM. THE MOST RECENT PRESS ARTICLE, BY AN INDEPENDENT LEFTIST COLUMNIST FOR EL TIEMPO, WAS NOTABLE FOR ITS DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW. IT REFERRED TO THE COLOMBIANS' ALLEGED PERSECUTION COMPLEX AND CALLED THE CBS PRODUCTION A PROFESSIONALLY ACCEPTABLE EFFORT WHICH WAS ACTUALLY MORE CRITICAL OF THE U.S. THAN COLOMBIA AND WHICH WAS MISINTERPRETED BY THE LOCAL MEDIA.

4. OTHER CORRUPTION CHARGES RAISED. THE CBS INCIDENT, WHILE LOSING ITS CURRENCY, WAS ALSO BEING PARTIALLY OVERSHADOWED BY DOMESTIC CHARGES OF CORRUPTION. IN ONE CASE, THE NATIONAL POLICE COMMANDER FOR THE ATLANTIC DEPARTMENT (WHICH INCLUDES BARRANQUILLA) WAS RELIEVED OF HIS COMMAND, REPORTEDLY AT THE BEHEST OF SEVERAL NORTH COAST DRUG TRAFFICKERS FOLLOWING A POLICE RAID ON THEIR HOMES. THE ALREADY TARNISHED REPUTATION OF THE NATIONAL CONGRESS WAS FURTHER DAMAGED BY AN ALVARISTA CONSERVATIVE'S CRITICISM OF THE PARTY'S OSPINA-PASTRANA FACTION FOR INCLUDING SEVERAL ALLEGED CRIMINALS, WHO HE NAMED, AMONG ITS CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATES LAST FEBRUARY. ALSO, THE PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE ADMITTED TO THE PRESS THAT "IRREGULARITIES" (I.E., GRAFT) HAD OCCURRED IN THE ADMINIS-

TRATION OF THE SENATE, BUT ADDED THAT THE NECESSARY REFORMS WOULD BE IMPLEMENTED. COMMENT: COLONAL ABSALON GUERRA, THE NATIONAL POLICE COMMANDER REFERRED TO ABOVE, CONFIRMED TO OUR CONSUL IN BARRANQUILLA THE PRESS REPORTS CONCERNING THE FORMER'S DISMISSAL. GUERRA ALLEGED THAT THE PERSONS WHOSE HOMES WERE RAIDED TRAVELLED TO BOGOTA TO DEMAND HIS REMOVAL. HE DID NOT KNOW TO WHOM THEY HAD SPOKEN, ALTHOUGH THE TRANSFER ORDER ROUTINELY CAME FROM THE DEFENSE MINISTRY. GUERRA ALSO MAINTAINED THAT THESE PERSONS WERE KNOWN TO HAVE CONTRIBUTED FINANCIALLY TO THE CAMPAIGN OF LIBERAL CANDIDATE TURBAY. WHILE THIS CANNOT BE TAKEN AS PROOF OF ANY KNOWLEDGEABLE WRONGDOING BY EITHER DEFENSE MINISTER VARON OR TURBAY, IT COULD BE USED AS ADDED FUEL IN THE CORRUPTION CONTROVERSY.

5. PUBLIC ORDER. THE M-19 TERRORIST ORGANIZATION TOOK ADVANTAGE
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OF THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ASSASSINATION OF POPULIST POLITICAL LEADER JORGE ELIECER GAITAN TO STAGE A PROPAGANDA COUP WHEN THEY FORCIBLY ENTERED GAITAN'S FORMER HOUSE, WHICH IS NOW A MUSEUM, LEFT A FLORAL WREATH AND PAINTED SLOGANS ON THE WALLS. THREE DAYS LATER AN M-19 GROUP BURST INTO A SCHOOL IN A POOR AREA OF BOGOTA WHERE THEY DISTRIBUTED STOLEN MILK, AND HARANGUED THE TEACHERS AND STUDENTS BEFORE FLEEING. IN ANOTHER SECURITY-RELATED INCIDENT, THE POLICE RAIDED A HOUSE IN NORTHERN BOGOTA AND KILLED SEVEN PERSONS SUSPECTED OF INVOLVEMENT IN THE RECENT KIDNAPPING OF FORMER DIPLOMAT MIGUEL DE GERMAN (BOGOTA 3032) WHOSE WHEREABOUTS REMAIN UNKNOWN TO THE AUTHORITIES. COMMENT: BOTH THE RAID ON GAITAN'S HOUSE AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF MILK ARE IN KEEPING WITH THE M-19 FLAIR FOR "ROBIN HOOD" PUBLICITY STUNTS. THE GROUP DOES NOT HESITATE TO USE VIOLENCE, HOWEVER, AND MAY ATTEMPT SOMETHING MORE SERIOUS ON APRIL 19, THE ORGANIZATION'S ANNIVERSARY.
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